

Tips for a Fit **2007!**

By *Laura Picciano, DO*

Welcome 2007! What would a New Year be if it didn't come with at least one resolution? There's always something hopeful and uplifting about starting a new year. If you are like most people, you've probably considered at least some sort of health resolution during your lifetime. Will this be the year you lose all that weight that has been bothering you? Have you indulged a little too much since Thanksgiving and lost sight of your fitness routine? The hope of "New Years" may help you to re-focus your priorities once again.

Resolutions can, however, have some negative consequences. Most of us, no matter how well meaning, make resolutions that result in failure. This can leave us frustrated, even depressed and anxious about not reaching our goals. Too often, I see that the failures may be related to unrealistic expectations and poor planning. The New Years phenomena should really begin with a good, careful insight into your life, as many health and behavioral problems have an underlying issue that needs to be unearthed and explained. For example, has an unhappy relationship caused you to turn to alcohol or drugs for solace? Is your way-too-demanding job causing you to overeat and gain weight? Before trying to solve the superficial problem, you must attack its cause or the problem will surface again. Once you've identified the problem, it's time to think of an action plan. Suppose I told you that you need to lose weight this year? The next step should be thinking about exactly how you are going to go about meeting this goal. Break the problem down into smaller goals to prevent feeling overwhelmed and start taking baby steps. Those small changes will result in big gains over time. Keep a journal to log in your thoughts and feelings throughout your journey and don't be afraid to comment on how happy or frustrated you may feel. Set realistic goals. The body and psyche abhors a vacuum! Suppose, on January 2, you say that you'll eat only vegetables and lean meats, exercise two hours AND drink your 64 ounces of water and not smoke that cigarette all at once. Maybe you'll do it, and maybe it will last a week or two. But more likely, it will fall apart. Change takes time; It takes deliberate small, repeated actions that do not dramatically alter the system all at once.

The weight loss industry goes into full swing this time of year. The average adult has gained several pounds during the holiday season and summer is really just around the corner for those of you contemplating a swimsuit! Start by focusing on health first. Is your weight healthy in relation to your height? Are you putting yourself at risk for diabetes and heart disease? You may need to take a trip to your doctor's office to decide this. Here's an easy way to help you. Take a tape measure and measure your waistline. For a woman, more than 35" is trouble, 40" if you're a man. That fat around the abdomen puts you at risk for serious health problems. Next, decide on a weight that is reasonable for your height. Most of us can recall a weight that we felt and looked our best at that didn't result in starvation or excessive exercise. If not, look at a body mass index table. Unless you are a very serious athlete, it is a helpful guide as to where your weight should fall.

Now start with setting goals. To lose one pound, you must burn 3500 calories, either through reduction of calories or increased activity. Invest in three items: a food scale, a measuring cup, and measuring spoons. Start getting a feel for exactly what a manufacturer's portion size looks like. Don't go by plates and cups. Nowadays, we've got some big ones that count for two or more portions when filled! Once you get a feel for portion sizes, you'll learn to recognize how much you're eating when you're dining out.

Start improving food choices gradually. First, eliminate caloric beverages, which accounts for many empty calories. This includes soda, lattes, even fruit juice which can be loaded with sugar. Reduce your alcohol intake when dieting, ideally, no more than one or two

drinks per week. Try to drink water. Finally, if you are trying to lose weight do not imbibe caloric "energy drinks." Water is fine, even when you exercise.

Focus on eating the right foods, even if you have unhealthy cravings at first. For example, eat your full healthy dinner prior to reaching for dessert. You'll be less likely to fill up on it after you're full. Learn which foods are best for your body. I've found the South Beach diet book to be a great source of healthy foods and recipes. Aim for about 1,250 - 1,500 cal/day for a woman, 1,800-2,100 cal/day for a man.

You must become active. The safest way to start is to get out and walk. I tell my patients to give me what they can, even if it's only ten minutes a day! Exercise does not have to be done all at once either. If you can only do small increments, say fifteen minutes before and after work, I'll take it! Just start fitting it into your schedule as often as you can. For those of you who desire more, add resistance training. Weights and even tension bands help to build and maintain muscle, which helps you burn fat even when inactive. Try to find something you enjoy doing (maybe a dance class!), you'll be more likely to continue.

If you want to most benefit from a resolution, pick smoking cessation. It is the most modifiable risk factor of atherosclerotic disease and cancer. Don't be frustrated if you have tried before and failed as most quitters have made many previous efforts. Nicotine is one of the most powerful chemical addictions you can acquire. Cigarettes exert a powerful chemical and behavioral addiction to smokers. Withdrawal from nicotine results in irritability, sleep disturbances, appetite surges and headaches. Symptoms start within just a few hours of the last cigarette. You need to expect these cravings and plan ahead - what will you do to keep yourself occupied when they occur? Give some thought and go ahead and pick a quit date

A trip to your doctor is also advised. There are a host of nicotine replacement systems, including patches, inhalers, gum and lozenges. In addition, you may wish to discuss Zyban, an antidepressant also known as bupropion. This helps to curb cravings. In a new drug called Chantix on the market, and has had some promising results for quitters. Take some time to learn about smoking cessation and visit the American Cancer Society's Web site at www.cancer.org. They even offer a quit line to give much-needed support. You can reach them at 1-800-ACS-2345 for information on how to locate your local quit line.

***Best wishes for a healthy and happy
New Year and New You!***

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